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ABSTRACT

Students preparing to teach writing in public school or college should understand the conceptual basis of composition and the teaching of writing, as well as be exposed to practical teaching experience. Writing teachers need to have an understanding of the structure and history of the English language, rhetoric, and the varied theoretical frameworks posited. In addition, a grasp of productive teaching methods is essential concerning the following: the importance of writing, audience, writing as process, positive instruction, and students' responsibility for their own writing. A special course in "Writing for Teachers of Writing" can provide practical work in tutoring, editing, and grading, as well as make available student teaching placements which emphasize written work. In order to sensitize prospective teachers to their students' needs, the quality of their own prose should be examined, and the following questions answered: What is a writing teacher? What's wrong with writing teaching today? What are the elements of effective writing instruction? In simulation of their future classroom experience, prospective teachers work in small groups, learn audience definition and response, work as tutors, and edit a class anthology. (KS)

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BALANCING THEORY WITH PRACTICE IN THE TRAINING OF WRITING TEACHERS

By

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A title such as mine inevitably sounds innocuous--who, after all, would want to split theory from practice completely? It also sounds pretentious--who can explain in a few pages just what a comprehensive balance of theory and practice of composition teaching might be? But "Balancing Theory with Practice in the Training of Writing Teachers" does indicate my thesis: that students preparing to teach writing in public school or college should understand important conceptual underpinnings of composition and the teaching of writing; and that they should take this understanding into themselves and try it out in practice before they begin to experiment on their students. So without being too innocuous or too pretentious, I will try to outline four kinds of theoretical or conceptual information that I think should be included in teaching of writing programs, and then I will try to illustrate briefly what I mean by a balance between theory and practice.

Four Kinds of Knowledge for the Writing Teacher

Ideally, the student preparing to teach writing would master a world of knowledge that runs from transactional analysis to neat handwriting, from conventions of the sonnet to the pyramid structure of the news story, from the most venerated ideals of Aristotle to the most voguish ideas of the latest educational trend. But no writing program can do everything, and it seems to me that four kinds of knowledge are especially important for future teachers of writing.

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First, writing teachers need to have an understanding of the structure and history of the English language sound enough to let them apply their knowledge to the teaching of revision, style, dialect differences, and the like. The program Francis Christensen outlined in his article, "The Course in Advanced Composition for Teachers" [1] is a good example of this sort of knowledge. Christensen wrote that the future teacher should move through a sequence of courses beginning with grammar, progressing to language history, and ending in composition. The goal of this sequential program, Christensen made clear, is thoroughness of preparation: an understanding of grammar complete enough that students can apply it in practical situations; an understanding of language history that reinforces grammatical principles learned in the earlier course; and a sense of usage, in the composition course, that rests on a clear understanding of how the language has developed. Something like this is essential in the training of writing teachers.

The second kind of knowledge that writing teachers need to have is a solid understanding of rhetoric. The range of such knowledge is illustrated by Donald Nemanich's words in "Preparing the Composition Teacher." Nemanich writes that he has his students "read such books as Dudley Bailey's Essays on Rhetoric or Ross Winterowd's Rhetoric: A Synthesis or Edward P.J. Corbett's Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student for some kind of historical perspective." And Nemanich continues this way:

> I expect students in my classes to know something of Aristotle and what he had to say about the art of persuasion. In addition, I want my students to know of recent work in rhetoric and composition, especially Ken Macrorie's "free writing," Francis Christensen's "generative rhetoric," and Robert Zoellner's "talk-write" pedagogy. . . . I hope that some time during the course, we would also talk about the work of Wallace Douglas, Janet Emig, James Moffett, and Edward Jenkinson and Donald Seybold--among others. [2]

The sheer mass of possible information about rhetoric that is implied by this list of titles and names may suggest that the training of writing teachers must involve considerable technical understanding of rhetoric. This is not necessarily true, as the NCTE book, What Every English Teacher Should Know implies when it distinguishes

between "good" and "superior" writing teachers. The latter, the book indicates, should have "a detailed knowledge of theories and history of rhetoric," though the "good" teacher need only be able to recognize "such characteristics of good writing as substantial and relevant content; organization; clarity; appropriateness of tone . . . ." [3] Similarly, in an article in The Journal of Teacher Education, Richard Larson denies that future writing teachers need "extended study of rhetorical theory," but argues that they should understand fundamentals of rhetoric. And what does Larson mean by fundamentals of rhetoric? This is how he puts it:

> . . . future teachers should recognize that writing is a series of choices among alternatives and that a good writer must shape his discourse carefully to make it reach its intended audience effectively and accomplish its intended purpose. This view of rhetoric . . . encourages teachers to approach their writing and that of their students with such questions as these: Whom am I addressing? On what occasion am I addressing him? What is my purpose in speaking? What is my relationship to him? What tone of voice ought I assume in this discourse? What kinds of language will best enable me to achieve my purpose in addressing this audience? [4]

And an intelligent understanding of--and ability to use--such questions is, I think, the second essential part of the training of writing teachers.

The third kind of knowledge that composition teachers need to master is some theoretical framework with which to sort through the ideas, methodologies, and conflicting claims of texts, journal articles, and convention addresses. Writing teachers face a confusing abundance of theories and approaches. They may pick up an essay, such as Wallace Douglas' chapter in How Porcupines Make Love, and read that effective writing classes must be flexible and fairly unstructured, since good writing instruction requires freedom, spontaneity, and a lucky combination of events and feelings. [5] But as they read, they may remember this claim from a text in their freshman writing class:

> Writing is a skill, and like playing the violin or throwing a discus, it may be learned by observing how others do it--by trying to imitate, carefully and thoughtfully, the way it was done. In writing, we can "observe" by copying

> sentences and paragraphs written by master stylists. And we can imitate these sentences and paragraphs in our own writing, making them a part of our basic repertoire.[6]

Writing teachers need to be able to make some sense out of the obvious differences in emphasis--if not outright contraditions--between such approaches. Similarly, they need to be able to find their way through the jungle Donald Stewart outlines in Freshman English Shop Talk:

> We teach beginnings, middles, and ends; topic sentences and development; the word, the sentence, the paragraph, the theme; narration, description, exposition, and argument; definition, classification, comparison and contrast, analysis, theme indivisible, or strategy unlimited. If we are linguists, we work on their syntax; if we are perceptionists, we improve their powers of observation; if we are pre-writers, we help them get their concepts manipulable before they begin to write; if we are behaviorists, we get them behaving and then proceed to modify that behavior on the spot; if we are rhetoricians, we make them aware of the subject, speaker/writer, and audience triangle and the way they must mediate between these entities.[7]

Part of the preparation of writing teachers, then, is developing in students the compass needed to find one's way out of this jungle--some theoretical framework against which writing teachers can test new materials and ideas in order to find effective and compatible approaches for their classes. Three overlapping frameworks that I suggest are these: Classical/Existential, Thinking/Writing, and Product/Process.

The first of these three pairs of concepts contrasts assumptions of objective truth, reality, and value that often are called "classical" with the more subjective tendencies of existential thought. The conceptual difference is one that Richard Ohmann implied when he contrasted the older rhetorical assumption "that the speaker or writer knows in advance what is true" with the more contemporary rhetorical "pursuit--and not simply the transmission--of truth and right."[8] When students understand the possibilities of the Classical/Existential framework, they are better able to draw useful and coherent distinctions between teaching approaches as different as Douglas' interest in freedom and flexibility and the freshman writing book that

advocates imitating the work of masterful stylists--approaches as far apart as Lou Kelly's "open" writing class [9] and Elizabeth Oggel's idea that students should be "furnished with a set of standards" so that they can see how their writing "measures up to these standards." [10]

The second pairing of concepts, Thinking/Writing, recognizes that behavioral psychology is making changes in the concept of the writing process, but that, at the same time, many teachers and materials follow an older internal idea of the writing process. Recognizing differences in approaches and materials that stem from basic differences in the psychology of writing lets future teachers find their way to consistent materials through the storm of contraditions suggested by two statements by Ray Kytle and Peter Elbow. First, there is this statement from Composition: Discovery and Communication:

> Composition of an essay does not begin when you put pen to paper. . . . an essential part of the total process of composition takes place before that first word is written. For before you can begin to write on a subject, you must discover what you want to say about it. [11]

And just as convinced that writing precedes ideas as Kytle is that thought precedes composition, Peter Elbow writes this in Writing Without Teachers:

> Instead of a two-step transaction of meaning-into-language, think of writing as an organic, developmental process in which you start writing at the very beginning--before you know your meaning at all--and encourage your words gradually to change and evolve. . . . Meaning is not what you start out with but what you end up with. [12]

The third pair of concepts, Product/Process, lets future teachers decide whether teaching approaches and materials place more emphasis on the written artifact produced by the student or on the process that leads toward this product. Obviously, product and process are both important to the writing teacher, and neither can be put aside without seriously oversimplifying the writing process. But differences in emphasis do result in different methodologies. Product-centered teaching tends to work by applying standards--marking papers, grading, and the like. Process-centered

teaching tends to keep instruction in grammar, structure, usage, punctuation, and organization within the highly individualized context of the writer, writing. Future writing teachers should understand these distinctions so that they can more mindfully develop their own teaching styles and select compatible teaching materials.

Besides knowledge of the history of the English language, of rhetoric, and of some theoretical frameworks with which to understand the wide range of approaches and materials available to them, future writing teachers need a broad awareness of reliable, productive methods to help students learn to write. I think, for instance, that prospective teachers should understand the ideas summarized by the dozen and a half points in the 1974 Position Statement of the NCTE's Commission on Composition.[13] Even more specifically, I think every would-be writing teacher should understand these five ideas:

-The importance of writing in the composition class and the value of what James Moffett calls "Learning to Write by Writing."[14]

-The importance of audience in any writing situation and the pedagogical usefulness of writing for groups of students and other audiences other than the teacher.

-The importance of seeing writing as a process that moves and grows so that initial ideas and sentences become more coherent, complex, and clear. Whether students conceive of this process as starting with thoughts or with physical behavior seems less important than that they know that writing is not a static thing. Indeed, teachers should understand the logic, usefulness, and limitations of pre-writing and behavioral approaches so that they will be able to modify their teaching to fit the individuals they will teach.

-The importance of positive instruction by teachers experienced in the agonies of trying to write.

-The importance of helping students take responsibility for their own writing so that they become their own best editors and teachers.

Balanced Preparation for Writing Teachers

Writing teachers-in-training, then, need to know quite a lot about concepts of composition teaching, about rhetoric, about the English language. But they should not just know this, in the sense of being able to pass multiple-choice tests over these subjects. Instead, they need to know information and principles behind the information. They need to know the "what" of composition teaching; but they also need to know the "how" and the "why." In fact, Richard Larson feels that writing teachers have a greater need to know "why" than "how," since the teacher "must be able to reveal to his students the choices that confront them as they write and the possible consequences of those choices, and enough about how words work and thoughts connect so that he can set tasks before his students in the order and against the background that will help them perform at their best" ("A Special Course," p. 172).

Of course, it is one thing to read such words as these, and quite another to make good on them. And the question faced by anyone developing a training program for future writing teachers is, essentially, how can the student learn the necessary what's and how's and why's? Courses in grammar, linguistic history, and rhetorical theory, on the one hand, may teach students much useful information (what) without helping them internalize the information enough to understand the all-important underlying principles. Advanced composition courses, on the other hand, may emphasize the how of writing to such an extent that they do not adequately help students toward why's of words, thoughts, and choices so important to the writing teacher. [15] Clearly, what is needed is a synthesis of some sort: a way to guarantee that students do not merely learn facts of grammar, rhetoric, or pedagogy: but that they think about what they learn, relate the facts to each other, examine the underlying principles behind the facts, and use the information in the kind of practical context that can give it genuine meaning for the students.

Such a synthesis requires, first of all, the information that comes in courses in The Structure of the English Language, The History of the English Language, and

Advanced Composition and Rhetoric. Beyond these courses comes the real balancing of knowledge with experience. The Teaching of Writing program should include a special course in Writing for Teachers of Writing. It should provide practical work in tutoring, editing, and grading, both within the Writing for Teachers of Writing course and in supervised programs within a campus writing center or writing laboratory. And it should provide, for students seeking certification as public school teachers, student teaching placements that emphasize work in writing.

The course work probably speaks for itself, except in the special course in Writing for Teachers of Writing. And the mechanics of allowing students to continue their experiences in a writing center and during practice teaching probably are fairly self-explanatory. So in the remainder of this paper, I would like to suggest the nature of the advanced Writing for Teachers of Writing course that I think is most likely to help students develop into effective composition teachers.

The Writing for Teachers of Writing course should be, first of all, a writing course in which students continue to develop their skills as writers and become more self-consciously familiar with the frustrations, dead-ends, and pitfalls that their students will encounter. In A Writer Teaches Writing, Donald Murray writes that "the most inexperienced student writer shares with the most experienced writer the terror of the blank page." [16] The Writing for Teachers of Writing course should exploit this fact and try to help students consciously realize how their writing experiences in the course--especially their frustrating and exhausting ones--are helping them become good teachers. Secondly, the course should press home to students the necessity, as a natural pre-requisite of their chosen profession, of their being writers. In What Every English Teacher Should Know, J.N. Hook, Paul Jacobs, and Raymond Crisp make the point that writing teachers must be writers: "Can a golf coach who never swings a club be successful? Can a shop foreman who never operates a machine do a good job? Can a writing teacher who never writes teach writing well? Probably not." They go on to say that this does not mean that every writing teacher must be a professional,

but that every writing teacher "should be able to make ideas hang together in prose, should know how to make each sentence express a clear idea clearly, should have a precise knowledge of mechanics." And they say, later, that this writing should be given up to sharp criticism, since the the teacher "who has experienced candid, constructive criticism can often become a more constructive critic" (p. 35). This matter of criticism is a third general feature of the Writing for Teachers of Writing course. The course should provide opportunity for students to serve as critics of other students' papers--and, of course, to have their papers examined by sharp-eyed students as well. It should do this in a friendly, constructive, but serious climate. And students should see that such acctivity is necessary, again as a pre-requisite of their chosen profession.

The Writing for Teachers of Writing course, then, is a writing course informed by the general spirit of Pope's lines from An Essay on Criticism:

> Let such teach others who themselves excell,
> And censure freely [well, not too freely] who have written well.

But in order that students learn specific information--what, how, and why--about the teaching of composition, the Writing for Teachers of Writing course should ask students to write about the teaching of writing. And to provide material about which to write, it should use readings, guest speakers, lectures, and discussions to direct students to a wide range of approaches and materials.

My own approach is to organize readings and materials into these areas:

1. What is a writing teacher? Donald Murray has a good deal of intelligent information about this in A Writer Teaches Writing. I also direct students to What Every English Teacher Should Know, to English methods texts, and to articles in English Journal, College Composition and Communication, College English, and other sources.
2. What's wrong with writing teaching today? This may sound like a negative topic, but my aim is to focus on problems that students will confront when they start to teach their classes, and also to use these problems as springboards to talk about productive solutions. Here, students read Eugene Smith's Teacher Preparation in Composition and other materials and hear presentations

by a number of classroom teachers.

3. What are the elements of effective writing instruction? This huge area is doomed by the brevity of the academic term from ever being complete enough. Typically, I ask students to become well-versed in four topics:
   -The "Learning to Write by Writing" Concept in James Moffett's Teaching the Universe of Discourse.
   -Students as Their Own Best Editors and Teachers--an idea deriving from Moffett and Murray, from Kenneth Bruffee's College English article on "Collaborative Learning," and from my own forthcoming book, Teamwork: Collaborative Strategies for the College Writer.
   -Evaluating Student Writing. I draw on a wide range of materials, here--from the CCCC Language Statement, to methods texts, to Barrett Mandel's College English article, "Teaching Without Judging," to R.W. Reising's CCC article, "Controlling the Bleeding."
   -Holding Student Conferences. Here, again, I use Murray, and also Lou Kelly's CCC article, "Is Competent Copyreading a Violation of the Students' Right to Their Own Language," and a variety of other materials.
   -In addition to these four subjects, I have students read material and hear presentations on a range of other topics: Motivating Students, "Publishing" Student Writing, Creating Interesting Assignments, Developing Lesson Plans, Writing Behavioral Objectives, The Students' Right to Their Own Language.

Since what I am recommending is a writing course, readings over such important topics as these cannot be allowed to become ends in themselves. They are grist for the writers' mills; they are substance for papers. To guarantee that students think of their research as a prelude to writing, I ask them to keep a Writer's Notebook--a looseleaf notebook with sections for "Writing Tips," "Teaching Tips," "Reactions," and "Works-in-Progress."

In the first sections, students record information they think may be of use to them in their future careers as writers and teachers--tips for their writing and their teaching of writing. In the Reactions section, they write a weekly response to one particularly interesting writing tip and to one teaching tip--twenty two-page entries by the end of the term. And in the last section, students begin to move from initial reaction statements toward more developed essays.

I ask students to write six essays in the ten-week term. And as a source of motivation, a way of developing audience-awareness, and a way to make students consciously aware that their writing is preparation for their chosen vocation, I handle the assignments so that students are writing their own "books" on the teaching of writing. In a series of "chapters"--which they write during the term, and which they revise and resubmit in a completed "book" at the end--students work with these six topics:

1. A personal experience--favorable or unfavorable--with writing instruction.
2. An exploration of causes of ineffective writing instruction.
3. An explanation of how to teach some fairly specific subject common in writing classes.
4. A definition of what a "good" writing teacher is.
5. An argument on behalf of the approach to writing instruction that the student considers to be most effective.
6. A compilation of the most useful tips from the student's Notebook--complete with necessary introductions, transitions, and conclusions.

These writing assignments, of course, are designed to help students use research and personal experiences, and they focus close attention on the information from the course's readings. To complete the assignments, that is, students must think about the principles behind what they are reading and discussing, and they must internalize the principles enough to develop their own personal perspectives on them. Beyond such analytic thinking and internalization, however, the sort of balanced synthesis I am advocating requires that students use the information they are learning. The Writing for Teachers of Writing course provides this practical dimension by using instructional methods that reinforce the ideas students are learning, methods that require that students practice what they are studying.

First of all, students work in small writing workshop groups where they practice the concepts of diagnosis, prescription, and feedback that they are reading about in Murray and Moffett. In these groups, that is, they are doing the things they have read that students should do as they learn to write by writing. They also are learning

about audience definition and audience response, and about how it feels to have a key point missed by people more interested in well-placed commas than in crucial ideas. In these groups, students come to understand the importance of cooperation, the power of peer-pressure, the difficulty of opening up to a critic, the bitterness of the writer under attack. And all of these things reinforce what the students are reading and writing about--and so help students prepare to be effective teachers in their future classes.

Secondly, students meet regularly with me for conferences on their writing. Here, I hope, they see how the conference methods and attitudes toward writing problems that they have been reading about really feel in operation. They come to understand, from their own responses to my questions, how much a student can tell a teacher about his/her own writing. And so, again, they receive reinforcement of the concepts they are learning.

Third, during the final third of the course, students work as tutors with freshman writing students within the context of the college's Writing Center. Here they learn the difference between working with other advanced writing students who are studying how to teach writing and working with regular students. The differences are great, and students typically reflect in their notebook entries and class discussion that the experience of practical tutoring contributes a good deal toward their preparation as writing teachers.

Finally, during the last weeks of the course, students work together to edit a class anthology--a "book" that represents the conclusions of the class about the teaching of writing. This project serves three useful functions. It provides one more chance for students to take theories into themselves and really examine them. It provides good practice in editing, shortening, and in the tact necessary to suggest changes in another person's writing. And it gives students personal experience with a class-project sort of instruction that they may use to build spirit and motivation in their classes in the future.

NOTES

[1]College Composition and Communication, 24 (May 1973), 166-167.

[2]College Composition and Communication, 25 (February 1974), 47.

[3]J.N. Hook, Paul Jacobs, and Raymond Crisp, What Every English Teacher Should Know (Urbana: NCTE, 1970), p. 18.

[4]"A Special Course in Advanced Composition for Prospective Teachers," Journal of Teacher Education, 20 (Summer 1969), 173.

[5]"Peak Experiences and the Skill of Writing," How Porcupines Make Love, ed. Alan Purves (Lexington, MA: Xerox, 1972), pp. 165-180.

[6]Winston Weathers and Otis Winchester, Copy and Compose, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969), p. 1.

[7]"Tips for the Freshman," Freshman English Shop Talk, 1, No. 2, [p. 5].

[8]"In Lieu of a New Rhetoric," College English, 26 (October 1964), 19.

[9]"Toward Competence and Creativity in an Open Class," College English, 34 (February 1973), 646.

[10]Thoughts Into Themes, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, 1957), p.v.

[11](New York: Random House, 1970), p. 2.

[12](New York: Oxford, 1973), p. 15.

[13]College English, 36 (October 1974), 219-220.

[14]Teaching the Universe of Discourse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), pp. 188-200.

[15]It was this second limitation that led Larson to conclude that the prospective English teacher "needs a special course in advanced writing, in most cases different from the one open to all students in a university." "A Special Course, " p. 168.

[16](Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 70.